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SUBJECT: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN MEXICO REMAINS A PROBLEM
NOTWITHSTANDING GOVERNMENT EFFORTS, CAMPAIGNS

¶1. Summary. Violence against women in Mexico remains a serious problem, common not only in the highly publicized cases of Ciudad Juarez but in a number of other states. While the Mexican Government has made a good faith effort to strengthen efforts to combat violence against women, these efforts have yet to register a major impact on the problem. To turn the page on violence against women, Mexico needs to promote a new culture of gender respect through education and campaigns against discrimination based on gender; it also needs to end impunity against abusers by meting out appropriate punishments. As problems predominantly occur at the local level, until Mexico develops state laws addressing violence against women at the state level and similarly disburses funding at that level, its efforts will continue to be significantly hampered. End Summary.

Gender Violence Continues to Claims its Victims

¶2. Ciudad Juarez often captures public and media attention for the high numbers of female homicide victims over the last 15 years. On a positive note, though, Ciudad Juarez has made progress on the legal side addressing this issue having either closed or indicted suspects in over 75 percent of the cases of femicide. Meanwhile, violence against women has proven a nationwide problem that touches the majority of Mexican women. According to the NGO National Citizen Femicide Observatory, seven out of every ten women have suffered abusive treatment at some time in their lives. This NGO also reports that over 1,014 girls, teenagers, and women were murdered from January 2007 through July 31, 2008; over 42 percent of whom were between 21 and 40 years old. The Deputy Attorney General for Chihuahua, maintains that over 80 percent of the women killed in Ciudad Juarez -- outside of narco-related violence) were victims of domestic violence. Most of the reported cases were registered in 13 states and the Federal District, including Chihuahua, Nuevo Leon, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tamaulipas, Mexico City, State of Mexico, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Morelos, Tlaxcala, Tabasco and Yucatan, demonstrating that gender violence is not confined to specific geographic areas.

GOM Efforts a Start, But Not Enough

¶3. In February 2007, President Calderon signed into law the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence which represents the government's first significant attempt to address the problem of violence against women from more of a comprehensive approach. The law identifies principles and modalities consistent with equality and non-discrimination that should serve as a foundation for women to enjoy a life free of violence. Recognizing the uneven attention this problem receives across the country it aims to better coordinate the efforts of government offices at the federal, state, and municipal level to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women. However, while the law defines as crimes such offenses as psychological and physical violence against women as well as the plundering of patrimonial goods and money regardless of age or marital status, it does not establish specific sentencing guidelines. As such, the law is practically unenforceable. (Note: The Federal Law

Pertaining to the Responsibilities of Public Officials establishes penalties for violence against women but by definition its purview is rather circumscribed. End Note.)

¶4. Further, the law passed by the Mexican Congress in 2007 applies on the federal level when in fact almost all abuses occur at the state level. While 24 states have already passed their own version of the law -- and had the foresight to include sentencing guidelines -- by October 2008, the states don't have access to the kinds of resources made available on a federal level. Whereas, Congress allocated approximately \$163 million to implement the law at the federal level, there is little evidence much, if any, of that money has trickled down to the states where the abuses are primarily occurring. Meanwhile, as complaints of violence against women increase, authorities note that out of every 10 women who register a complaint between 6 and 8 back out for fear of reprisals or insufficient resources to carry their case forward. On the prosecutorial side, Mexican legal experts report that the number of cases successfully brought to trial and prosecuted remain disappointing, in part because societal attitudes continue to complicate efforts by the prosecution to build strong cases.

¶5. The National Institute for Women (INMUJERES), a public institution established in 2001 to foster equality between the sexes and promote respect for and prevent violence against women, assumes a key role in the government's efforts to change attitudes. (Separately, each of Mexico's 31 states plus the Federal District has its own state women's institution.) Its campaign "Men Against Violence" represented the government's first attempt to address the

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cultural attitudes of men in tackling the gender violence problem. It urges men to commit themselves to healthy, responsible and non-violent relationships, and looks to shape men's values to discourage violence and discrimination against women. Since its creation, INMUJERES has provided training on gender equality to 1,560 personnel in the Judicial Branch, held six different meetings with state and municipal authorities to create state-level organizations that address and attend to violence against women, implemented a program called Model of Gender Equity for private companies and public institutions to review their practices and incorporate a gender perspective and is preparing a national survey on the problem that will be released in October 2009. INMUJERES also is working with governmental institutions and NGOs to achieve this year's goal of signing an agreement with the Supreme Court to provide training to public prosecutors, since many times they are unaware of the existence of the law, and to develop programs to provide protection to Mexican women living abroad that suffer violence. Representative of INMUJERES have expressed a desire to expand bilateral cooperation with the U.S. on official campaigns against trafficking in persons in part by bringing in special speakers.

¶6. INMUJERES does not lack for resources. In 2009, it received approximately \$700 million to carry out programs throughout all of Mexico. Some experts maintain, however, that the organization is still trying to find its identity and its sense of mission. In the meantime, it does not appear that funds are being spent down according to some overarching plan. Instead they are managed from Mexico City and are not as of yet being widely disbursed at the local level as part of an effort to address attitudes at the grassroots level.

Civil Society Seeking Greater GOM Commitment

¶7. A number of human rights NGOs criticize the government's efforts thus far as insufficient for dealing with the gender violence problem and have taken up initiatives on their own to draw greater attention to the problem of violence against and pressure the government to do more. Last November, a

group of NGOs consisting of more than 500 members embarked on a week-long "No More Violence Against Women" march from Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua to San Cristobal de la Casas, Chiapas calling for an end to violence against women in Mexico and demanding that the Federal Government resolve pending cases, particularly those involving femicides -- gender motivated killings of women. Some activists described this march as merely the first phase of a new, more energetic campaign to pressure the government to take greater initiative on this issue. NGOs also have criticized the Gender Violence Law for not establishing specific enough punishments for perpetrators of violence against women. Women's rights NGOs point to in the continued high incidence of femicides, in particular, as evidence that the GOM is not as committed as it should be to fighting the problem.

Comment

¶8. Cultural attitudes that often times cast Mexican women as objects to be used and discarded are deeply ingrained in Mexican society. In fact some experts actually believe that violence against women is on the rise, in part due to women's advances in social, intellectual, economic and political affairs that threaten some men who are afraid of being left behind or pushed aside. For Mexico to turn the page on violence against women, these attitudes must be transformed. While Mexico has taken some initial steps toward treating the gender violence problem by adopting a federal law and developing a number of education campaigns, much more needs to be done at the local level. Campaigns promoting greater gender respect must be broadly dispersed at a grassroots level across Mexico. Law enforcement officials, including police, prosecutors, and judges, need to be more widely trained in the implementation of state laws on violence against women, provided they exist. Lastly, aggressors need to know that they will be punished when they commit an act of violence against women, either inside or outside the home -- something that is not immediately apparent given low prosecution and conviction rates for violence against women.

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